# Integral politics

I love analysing our Dutch political landscape by looking who is standing where and who is heading towards what. When I look at the wider world, I clock the enormous challenges we as humanity face. I see many small, local initiatives in energy, food, fashion (like shoes made from pineapple fibers) and other sustainable issues. Yet, only moderate progress was achieved at the Climate Summit in Poland and the Netherlands, even with the initiative of organizing climate tables to come with proposals towards fulfilling our commitment to the Paris accords, is one of the countries that have already fallen behind schedule. If we don't effectuate a radical change soon, the temperature might rise by 3 degrees in 2100 with far dire consequences than stated in the last report of the IPCC that already shows us the risks and consequences of a 1,5 rise. Our schoolchildren are seeing a future of doom. But where are the politicians? Where are the political parties and movements that can lead us out of this truly nightmarish scenario?

I know where they are. They are keeping themselves busy fighting each other and trying to be bigger – preferably the biggest. Many of them suppose that following 'the voice of the people' will bring them closer to that success. The fear of losing votes, of being seen as an 'intellectual' who has no connection to the people, the fear of falling out of the 'group' (the political elite) - all these fears are bad advisors and the voice of the people doesn't automatically lead to the wisest solutions (see Hitler's Germany or the recent elections in Brasil). What we need now are courageous politicians.

I asked myself: how did the democratic development in my country manifest up until now? Where and why did we get stuck? In this article you will find an analysis of the current situation in the Netherlands and a direction towards progress. I hope it will also serve other countries in Europe and beyond.

1. Politics in the Netherlands

The Dutch parliamentary democracy started in 1848 with the Constitution of Thorbecke and since
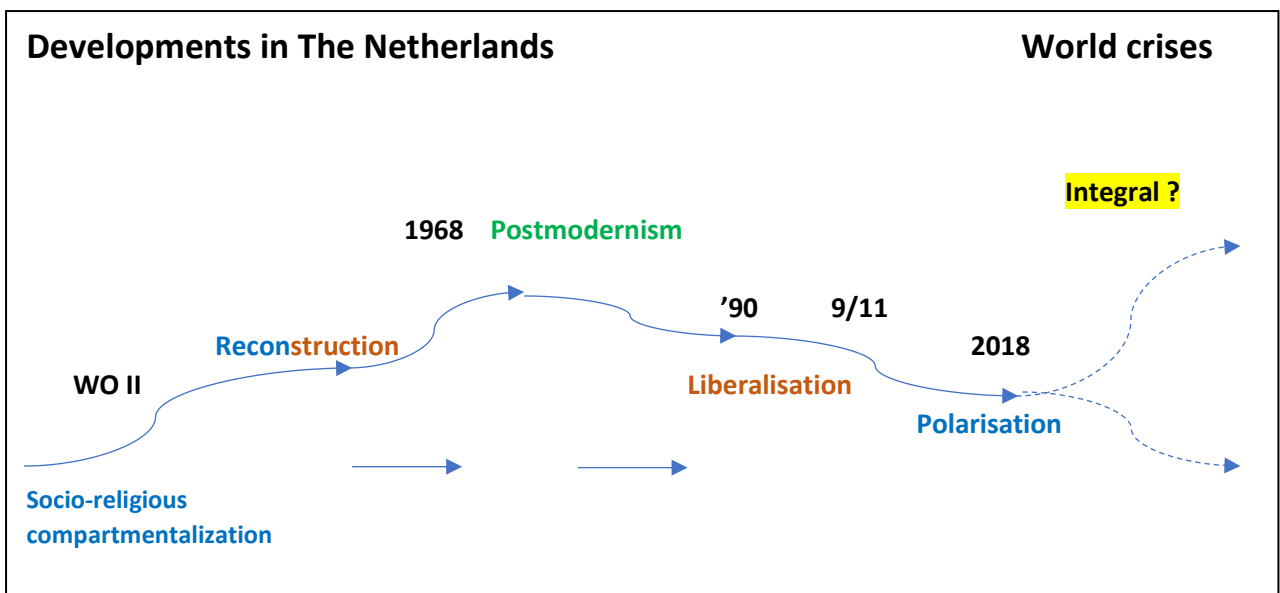
more than a century the voting system is also accessible to workers (1917) and women (1919). In the beginning, our parliamentary democracy was organised according to the pillar system: the protestants, the catholics, the socialststs, the communists, the liberals - each group had its own followers (socio-religious compartmentalization). During this period the worldviews of each pillar

about what was right or wrong in their eyes, were quite clear. These worldviews mainly had a *Traditional* character. After World War II, the common focus was on re-building the country, working hard, entrepreneurship, industrial innovation, scaling up, nationwide cooking on gas, the Delta works, a pension for each person over 65 and welfare for everybody. The optimism and belief in *Modern* society (ratio, science, capitalism, consumentism, drive for individual success) was widespread.

In the sixties, new ideas arose in society and politics. The second feminist wave; peace movements and anti-war demonstrations; resistance against fascism, racism, sexism; new forms of education; an increasing belief in the possibility to shape society; solidarity with other places like the South-Africa movement; international law practice and Human Rights. Also, attention was focused on personal development in therapy, counseling, support groups and spirituality. The **Postmodern** view sprang up in response to the negative sides of the Modern perspective and the corresponding living conditions. This worldview emphasizes the importance of feelings, equality, harmony and sustainability. Each voice is equally important. Absolute truth does not exist ,because everything must be understood within its context (cultural relativism) and all hierarchy is wrong.

In the nineties, after the fall of the Berlin wall, politicians on the left and right thought that Capitalism had 'won'. Our successive coalition governments (a collaboration of liberal and socialist parties) opted for the **neoliberal** way in which many public services such as energy supply, the state bank, health care, social housing and social services were gradually turned into commercial enterprises. Privatisation, market forces and participation became the new magic formulas. The effects are both 'booming business' as well as a growing gap between the rich and the poor.

The attack on the TwinTowers on 9/11/2001 was the start of a cultural regression in which (pre)judices about 'the other' could suddenly be voiced openly again and populist parties received a lot of attention. In 2008, this was exacerbated by the financial crisis. Now in 2019, the polarisation in our country has become highly visible like in the issue of having black-faced people accompanying Santa Claus. The political field has developed into a complex patchwork of political parties: every voice likes to have its own party. Still, the **liberal, Modern** perspective dominates, interlaced sometimes with the **Postmodern** one, for instance in issues of climate and sustainability. However, the direction towards the future is quite vague.

This moment of chaos, of no clear direction and big uncertainty is not unique to The Netherlands and various people are writing and speaking about it like Yuval Noah Harari (*21 lessons for the 21^e century*, 2018), Alessandro Baricco (The Game, 2019) and Allan Larsson[1] (*How can we understand the times we are living through*, 2017).

According to Larsson, the long wave of neoliberal economic politics of the last 30 years has faded leaving us with an 'empty room'. After the downfall of first fascism and then communism, also capitalism has lost its credibility. Like Kate Raworth[2] he shows how our economic principles are based on quicksand and have led to big inequalities in income and capital. People see through this and come into action: Brexit, yellow vests or voting on (extremist) right wing parties because they pretend to know the simple solution for all problems. The trust in the existing political system is wavering. Larsson: "*While our societies have moved to the right in terms of economic and social poli-cy, they have moved left in terms of values such as gender equality and individual rights. A*

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[1] Former financial minister in Sweden, at this moment EU-advisor Social Rights and connected to the Swedish thinktank Global Utmaning.
[2] See https://view.joomag.com/pioniers-magazine-okt-nov-dec-2018-verandering-en-transformatie/0421858001536216851/p46

combination of economic stagnation and social decline, "insecurity in times of change", and progress in civil rights and gender equality, has triggered the kind of political and populist revolts that we now see in the US and in many parts of Europe, exploited by conservatives and far-right parties. This can be described as "discontent of declining expectations". Democracy and democratic institutions are at risk." Summarizing: the Modern and Postmodern eras seem to be over, but what will the next step be?

2. We need a new perspective!

Larsson is not alone in his view that we are sitting in an 'empty room' without an appealing vision for the future and without enough leadership to lead us out of the chaos. Harari: *"The old stories are imploded and till now no new story emerged that might serve as a replacement."*

Characteristic of all stories and visions which have dominated society and politics up until now, is the belief of being right. Such an excluding attitude overpowers the interaction: my world view, my value system, my goals, my way are really much better than yours and therefore I jump onto the battlefield expecting to win. The whole system is about winning and obtaining (political) power. "I am right and I also want to be seen to be right." When the other is speaking, someone with a fixed worldview will be completely involved in thinking about their reply or response. They are not interested at all in what the other brings forward. This seems a black and white picture I am painting here, but follow politics and/or the (social) media and this is the reality as it arises from the debates and confrontations. The problem is that we will never progress if we go on with this pattern, since so much of the available time and energy is taken by opposing the opinions of the other instead of looking for similarities.

In an interview in the Dutch newspaper NRC (15/16 december 2018) Larsson said: "*Much more political parties entered the field. They are in a constant wrestling match. The political landscape becomes more fragmented. In the past, dissatisfaction was canalised. Political and societal organisations negotiated with each other and arrived at compromises. That system is getting fragmented which makes it difficult to achieve compromises [..]. Only majorities against something can be found, no majorities in favour of anything. Therefore nobody can neglect the radical right even though they have only 20% of the vote.*" Larsson sees the protest of the yellow vests as one of the

many signs that politics in the western world are at a dead end. The existing system doesn't function any more, but we cannot yet spot a new system that can take its place. In Europe and the VS we no longer have a paradigm or a framework, no ideology, he says, and that is causing frustration and fear. *"Our leaders, our organisations, our political parties, the way we organised society: all is part of that old system. And the answer to all these frustrations and fears will not come from that old system, it will not persuade the citizen any more".*

Fortunately, there also are signs showing a way out of this darkness. Like Einstein famously said: *"We can not solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them".* So it is time for a new framework, an innovative paradigm, another perspective. We need an ***integral*** vision that includes all previous worldviews and focuses on AND-AND solutions instead of getting stuck in OR-OR scenarios.

Despite good intentions, many societal problems are approached from one perspective only. The health and education sectors are 'great' examples. Especially after incidents and dramatic events, the government tries to minimise risks and recurrences by imposing more rules. Increasing bureaucracy is the result of such a fear driven policymaking without taking a higher level view.

Integral thinking transcends partial approaches and integrates the effective elements of all previous perspectives. Thankfully, this integral perspective is already forming[3]. In the evolutionary flow of humanity's development, we find ever new answers to ever changing life conditions. Currently, a worldwide crisis is spreading into all areas, while at the same time we know more than ever and technology is further advanced than ever. In order to benefit from our high level of advancement, the transition towards Integral thinking and acting is essential, at least for the leaders in the world. This (momentous) leap into the Integral paradigm is – especially in The Netherlands – a concrete possibility as it is already becoming visible in a number of individuals and organisations/businesses[4]. In the political realm this is completely new.

Value systems or paradigms: how do you look to the world?

Evolutionary development

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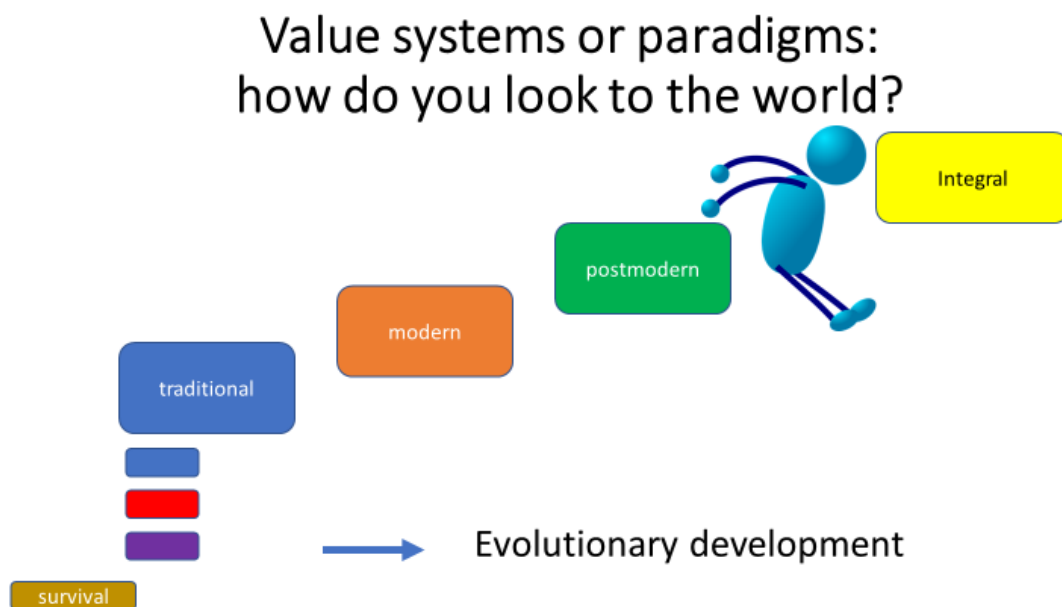
[3] See: Ken Wilber: essay *'Integral politics'*, 2018 and Robin Lincoln Wood: '*The momentous leap. Thriveable Tranformation in the 21st Century'*, 2018
[4] As an example see the experiments with Holacracy on www.synnervate.nl

3. What is the Integral Perspective?

In this section you will find a short description of the emerging Integral perspective. Important principles are: transcending and including of all previous value systems; inclusivity; flexibility; sustainability; integrity and attuning to the big picture/greater whole.

Insight and overview

Integral thinking means understanding the important values, motives, cognitive patterns, choices, actions and ways of life that are central in all previous paradigms[5]. An Integral Thinker is able to see what is driving people living from a Traditional, Modern or Postmodern perspective, what touches them, what is essential to them. They know their own qualities and observe their pitfalls. They are able to apply this awareness in the interaction with people who adhere to all those values as well as with themselves. In fact, every human being develops in the same way up to he level that each can reach, depending on their life conditions. The most important characteristic of the Integral perspective is this inclusion of the 'healthy', positive elements of each of the other perspectives. This way of thinking realizes that every perspective has its own deeper truth and is of value to the greater whole.

To give an example, an integral thinker is able to tell the contemporary story from a broad context of any issue, for instance the one of migrants, that transcends the usual polarisation into pro and contra. Telling the story of what is happening in today's world, they speak the 'language' of the other value systems, including:
- the role of the family/the group, contact with nature and natural processes and rituals
- energy, decisiveness,the meaning of power and dealing with conflicts
- structure, ethics (what is right and wrong), rules and procedures, rights and plights, loyalty
- sense of purpose, efficiency, freedom of speech, scientific research, entrepreneurship and success
- relations and feelings, communication, equality, solidarity.

This worldview is about letting go of the OR-OR thinking and looking for AND-AND solutions. The most productive way is to include àll perspectives, to connect the old and the new and to choose the best from all approaches.

Transcending goal

A broad story starts with a transcending goal that addresses the objectives of each of the value systems and includes these into an all-embracing 'purpose', an attractive and realistic future vision. During the process of formulating this purpose, discernment is made between what is better for society/ the world as a whole and what leads to regression and decline. The collective interest and (evolutionary) progress are more important than individual interests or profitmaking.

> Example: The growing differences between income and capital prove to be a threat to a balanced world. The current system of the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer has a destabilising effect (see the yellow vests, voting for Trump, Brexit, Venezuela, economic migrants).

The core of integral thinking is making choices based on what is móre true and móre of value. The Integral perspective advocates focused growth in all sectors within clear boundaries and based on positive human values. An attractive example is the Doughnut Economy as coined by Kate Raworth[6]. She draws a picture of the 'embedded economy' that includes all essential factors (like energy,

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[5] See www.spiraldynamicsintegral.nl
[6] See Kate Raworth: *Doughnut Economics, Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist,* 2017.

resources, raw materials and waste) and actors (like households, communities, the state and businesses) within the boundaries of our planetary possibilities.

Inclusive approach

Integral looks for multidimensial value-creation and win-win-win situations (I win, you win and everyone including the planet wins). Example: a catering service in an old people's home also functions as a small restaurant for the neighbourhood, making a profit that can be used to organise activities for the residents. Or, implementation of a basic income that, apart from more freedom for the recipients and extra money for the local government (at least in the Netherlands where people receive social benefits), will also lead to lower expenses in health care, better school results of children and more opportunities for informal care[7].

Conscientious leadership

We need a new kind of leadership which is able to implement an Integral approach of world's problems. We need mature and wise leaders who know their ego pitfalls and dedicate their life to the future of humanity and the evolutionary process in the world. Women and men who are able to inspire, stimulate and guide others in taking on fitting roles in society.

Truly functioning on an Integral level means investing more time and attention in the development of spiritual consciousness (beyond traditional religious forms or postmodern spirituality[8]). This is necessary because individual and collective forms of spiritual practice like mindfulness, meditation and 'circles of creation'[9] support us in being open to the new and the unknown. These practices allow room for 'not-knowing' in contrast to the conventional political process where one is excluded if they don't know or at least pretend to know. 'Slowing down' is the basic movement needed to progress. Or as the Belgian activist and thinker Ria Baeck says: *"We don't have time anymore to do it quickly. Let policymaking be life-affirming, otherwise sit still and wait a little longer."* By taking time to be truly present it is possible to view at a deeper and more essential level and see things that are not yet visible to our 'habitual thinking'.

In the budding Integral world, life is as it is, no better, no worse. But there is a clear direction: use the 'healthy' achievements of all previous perspectives to find innovative solutions to the current complex challenges in our world and to create opportunities for people to develop themselves and to become who they really are. And thus release the evolutionary process. We need this Integral way of thinking to invent widely held and broadly applicable solutions for e.g. the climate problem.

4. Building up new politics together

In the Netherlands, no political party is yet able to think and act from this Integral perspective, although it is very needed. Apart from a new way of thinking and acting, innovation of the political and democratic realm is necessary. How can we make an Integral vision concrete and manifest during the decision making process? How can we transcend the yes-no power play and collect all the life-affirming elements, experiences and arguments of the various value systems merging them into an innovative apporoach?

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[7] See Rutger Bregman: *Utopia for Realists And How We Can Get There*, 2018 and http://jdacties.nl/
[8] See o.a. Ken Wilber: *The Religion of tomorrow* and Adi Da: *Prior Unity*
[9] See www.collectivepresencing.org and the podcast : https://anchor.fm/emerge/episodes/Ria-Baeck---Emergent-Collective-Practice-and-Applied-Presence-e2qppp?fbclid=IwAR0PhsR68_O9glc56ZgZuN0bMnozgTZbnkE6UTR6Gh4rfCItwbU3eyWMfYo

Case 1 The Citizens' Assembly

With their discussion on abortion Ireland gave us a great concrete example. Until recently abortion was only allowed in that country when the life of the mother was in danger. In case of rape, incest or slight survival changes of the foetus, ending pregnancy was forbidden. It will be clear that this led to many poignant cases. But a change in the abortion law was non-negotiable since the traditional Catholic population and the conservative countryside were diametrically opposed to the progressive urban population.

Nevertheless, in May 2018 over three million Irish people could make their opinion on this very delicate issue known through a referendum on legalizing the cessation of pregnancy. More than 64% participated in this referendum with 66,4% voting in favour of a more flexible abortion law and 33,6% voting against. This landslide was the result of Ireland having changed the democratic rules. In 2016, the Fine Gael-minority coalition launched a Citizens Assembly to restore the political trust of the voters by reaching back to ideas about democracy in ancient Greece.

The Citizens Assembly consists of 99 Irish citizens. They are randomly chosen based on the idea that 'the ordinary Irish' must be represented in the assembly: every age, gender, social class and region. The members of the Citizens Assembly start with an inquiry into the issue they will discuss and advise on. Previous issues were the ageing population, a fixed period for parliament, conditions for referendums and climate change. And then, abortion.

The Citizens Assembly talks with experts and those concerned and with each other about potential medical, moral and ethical objections. They summarise their conclusions in reports and recommendations that they submit to the **National Parliament**. The recommendation of the Citizens Assembly to lift the ban on abortion came as a huge surprise, but politicians have to act upon the recommendations. The referendum in May 2018 was an obligatory step in this process, because in Ireland a referendum is needed for each constitutional change.

The Citizens Assembly differs in two ways from decision making elected institutions in a democracy:
- **The random selection of participants** which leads to a broad representation of society. Thus the cramped bubbles of professional politicians are bypassed and politics become less elitist.
- **The created conditions for the meetings** that provide for balanced expert panels where all perspectives and arguments that matter are brought forward. Then, the participants get enough time to reflect and discuss the issue together.

These basic elements create other political dynamics than we are used to. The effect is that the discussions in the Citizens Assembly are much more harmonious than the debates in the Parliamentary Committee where party standpoints need to be defended. The participants themselves are very proud of their achievement. They mentioned their 'personal transformation', their deep involvement in the work they did and their change of opinions.

This example shows that it is not very hard to create a system to deal with complex problems in a democratic way, embedded in current political structures. Dimitri Courant, a French political scientist and rersearcher, wrote about this process of democratic innovation : "A new mark, a new norm has been set that we have to take seriously".

Case 2: Participatory democracy[10]

In 2011, a new democratic structure including 'direction groups' has been established in a part of Amsterdam within the framework of the Participation Law. Here, groups decide on citizens' initiatives which can be allotted budgets from a fund of € 600.000 annually that is made available by the local government for this part of the city. This structure is an example of the process that – activist and author Manu Claeys[11] called 'participatory democracy'.

In this system of these 'direction groups', new forms of cooperation and consultation between citizens and government arise. The working groups are not captured in protocols but are meant to react quickly and efficiently to the continually changing circumstances. In the groups, a lot of attention is drawn to the opinion of the participants. Sumadi Bambang Oetomo, one of the leaders of this movement, says: *"You can be who you are and express your opinion. We listen to you and we don't polarize like in the political debate saying: I agree or I don't agree. When needed, decisions are taken by majority voting. But 70% of the time there is consensus. In 15% of the cases, someone has another proposal and we come to an agreement. We only vote in 15% of the cases. Sometimes a lot of different and seemingly incompatible opinions are voiced, but after some discussion we still arrive at a uniform decision. Claeys says that consensus happens much more than one would expect. In the three years that I have been involved in this process, I discovered that the secret of this way of cooperation is listening to each other. By this listening and because everybody is given time to speak, the individuals become more interested in the bigger whole and they are less attached to their own opinion. In my experience, consciousness wants to be seen and if it is seen, it starts moving naturally".*

In this new form of cooperation everyone is seen and heard, but there is no control over the final result. Solutions emerge that no single individual has come up with and that cannot be claimed by anyone.

Other examples

In recent years, David van Reybrouck, a journalist for the Correspondent, had been looking for innovative forms of conducting politics. He described five public participation processes at national level in this decade. Two were organised in Canada, the other three in Iceland, Ireland and the Netherlands. In the latter cases the participants were given a temporary mandate and a budget. The issues at hand were fundamental such as the renewal of the Election law or even the Constitution, the heart of our democracy. This goes beyond talking about wind mills or parking places[12]. In 2012, the G1000 was organised in Belgium[13], which is a Citizens Summit consisting of 1,000 randomly selected people, followed by citizens panels for making policies.

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[10] Thanks to Sumadi Bambang Oetomo, lead Constellation De-kolonisation, Center for Human Emergence

[11] See Manu Claeys*: Redt de Democratie*, 2018.

[12] https://decorrespondent.nl/514/democratische-vernieuwing-het-kan-dus-wel/112381906274-601af729.
Seea also David van Reybrouck, "*Against Elections"* https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/18/against-elections-the-case-for-democracy-david-van-reybrouck-review

[13] http://www.g1000.org/nl/introductie.php

In order to implement these forms of participatory democracy in smoothly, various methods have been developed like the Lewis method of Deep Democracy which is a powerful tool for decision making and conflict resolution within heterogeneous groups. The method is highly practical with techniques for decision making while giving attention to and appreciation of other opinions, without too many compromises ('polderen') and without ignoring conflicts. Oppostions and conflicting opinions are inquired into in a respectful way[14].

The American political theorist Benjamin Barber takes another approach. In his eyes, national politicians are too ideological which leads to increasing polarisation, whereas mayors are good role models for uniting people around issues that ask for practical solutions. He investigates the possibility of a world government of mayors[15]. In the Netherlands, the Code Orange movement aims to reform our democracy from being based on political parties towards a democracy based on cooperation with the citizens[16].

Finally

While mainstream media focus on the formal political events and the often highly predictable responses, new movements and experiments begin to surface. Integral thinking begins to manifest, not only in words, concepts, analyses and deeper insights in what is happening in the world, but it is also christallizing in daily political practice, as you can see in the above mentioned examples. These new initiatives will grow and spread if not blocked by too regressive powers.

We are living in chaotic times, probably in the centre of a big transition, but being within, it is difficult to see and understand what is happening. So, how can we get more insights, how can we use the knowledge that is already present. I think that Spiral Dynamics integral (SDi)[17] can help us and I hope this article shows its benefits. Next steps will be: more experiments with new forms of democratic government, an Integral Manifesto written by European Integral Thinkers[18] and showing politicians and other people how the Integral perspective gives us the insights and overview that we need to find a way out of the current chaos.

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Utrecht, April 2019

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[14] https://deepdemocracy.nl/over-deep-democracy/achtergrond

[15] https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300209327/if-mayors-ruled-world

[16] https://codeoranjedemocratie.nl/

[17] See www.spiraldynamicsintegral.nl/en/

[18] In The Netherlands I am cooperating with the Political Constellation of the CHE-NL (Center for Human Emergence), in Europe with the group Integral Politics being part of the new organisation Integral Europe.